



SUCCESS STORY

CENTRAL ASIA MEDIA JOIN FORCES

A2I increases citizen access to reliable and timely information



Photo Credit to Internews Network

Regional media experts sharing their views during a panel discussion on current media challenges and opportunities

Participants' takeaways from the conference:

"Crisis is an opportunity for development and new media is the main driver of that development."

"I appreciated the chance to work closely with my regional colleagues and got ideas for exchanging content more actively and further developing our website."

U.S. Agency for International Development:
<http://www.usaid.gov/central-asia-regional>
www.usaid.gov/kyrgyz-republic

March 2015 – Local media in Central Asia are hungry for tools and strategies that will allow them to continue to operate and even thrive in a less-than-optimal advertising market and difficult financial conditions. The recession in Russia has led hundreds of thousands of Central Asian labor migrants to return to their homes, causing a severe drop in remittances, which make up a sizable portion of GDP in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in particular. In addition, regional media agencies face a range of other challenges including insufficient strategic and financial planning skills, trouble retaining professional staff due to low salaries, and lack of reliable audience metrics to attract advertisers. Moreover, the 2015 transition from analog to digital broadcasting remains problematic for most media outlets in the region. Many of them cannot afford to purchase the new equipment they need to produce and broadcast digital content, nor to pay the fees charged by the companies that control access to the digital broadcasting spectrum. In some cases, legal and regulatory obstacles may prevent stations from gaining access to broadcasting frequencies.

To discuss these and other burning issues, in March 2015, over 100 media professionals from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and South Korea gathered at a regional media conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The conference was funded by USAID's [Access to Information \(A2I\)](#) program and supported by a number of local and international partners.

Important outcomes of the conference were the connections it helped create among regional media managers and the exchange of successful solutions to shared problems. For example, after listening to a presentation by Anastasia Snegireva from [AltaPress](#) in Barnaul, Russia about content monetization and other services that can provide additional revenue beyond advertising, several participating media managers expressed interest in sending their teams on a study tour to AltaPress at their own expense.

Several media companies agreed to partner to jointly produce and exchange content after seeing what others had to offer during conference presentations. For instance, the [Avesta](#) information agency from Dushanbe, Tajikistan and [Tiroz](#) TV

and radio station from Khudjant, Tajikistan started exchanging audio news packages in April 2015, just one month after the conference. They are now drafting a year-long cooperation agreement to strengthen their commitment to the new partnership.

In Kyrgyzstan, four new media outlets joined the content exchange initiative managed by USAID's Access to Information program. The initiative allows participating media outlets to expand their programming without paying additional fees by broadcasting content produced by other A2I partners.

In addition, the conference inspired participating media managers to partner to defend their legal interests. In April, representatives of Tajikistan's TV, radio and production studios, many of whom met at the conference, convened in order to unite their advocacy efforts to abolish a law requiring licenses for audiovisual content production. The onerous and time-consuming process of getting this license discourages many would-be content producers from moving forward with their ideas and stifles development of Tajikistan's media sector. The meeting participants prepared a joint letter for the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Development regarding this issue. If approved, the arguments presented in the letter have a good chance to be considered by the country's Parliament.

Finally, the conference participants learned about NewReporter.org, A2I's online multi-language education hub for media professionals that contains useful educational materials, grant announcements, and other news of note for regional media practitioners. Since the conference, the website has become a very popular platform. For instance, articles on topics covered at the conference - "[Strong brand as a way to survive](#)," "[The digital world and media of the future](#)," "[Transition to digital broadcasting in Central Asia: challenges and prospects](#)" - have each been viewed more than 3,500 times.

The conference will take place on an annual basis until the end of the A2I program. The Access to Information (A2I) program, implemented by Internews, increases access to quality and timely information in order to keep government institutions accountable to citizens in Central Asia.